



## Aristotle on Friendship



# Overview

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# Reminder: Virtues

- the goals of various human activities can be arranged hierarchically.
- the *ultimate* goal of human activity is happiness (*eudaimonia*)
- a human being is happy if it can perform well its function
- we cannot perform our function well if we don't have virtues
- virtue = a characteristic that enables us to be excellent practical reasoners, and thus, we need virtues to be happy.
- virtues can be characterised by their object and the two extremes to which they are opposed; we learn them by imitating the virtuous person.

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# A Developmental Account of Virtue Ethics

The advantages of such a picture:

- Places great emphasis on practical reason
- Explains moral development: we grow up in a certain culture, get accustomed to certain moral ideas, and then — if we reach that point — we might start questioning or modifying them for our own lives.
- Always take the agent into consideration
- We have to do the work ourselves — not a “one size fits all” account
- It does not give a decision procedure.
- You will be responsible for your own choice (and not a manual).

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- is such a picture applicable? Can it give guidance as to how to act?
- can virtues conflict?
- Is this account egoistic? Does this account only assume self-regarding attributes? (It seems that we've been focusing on happiness and how to achieve it.)
- Especially, why should we want to have friends?

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# Kinds of Friendship

Different kinds of friendship:

- ① **Friendship based on utility**: for the sake of mutual benefit (e.g., business relations, etc.)
- ② **Friendship based on pleasure**: the basis of the relation is shared pleasures (having a good time)
- ③ **Friendship based on goodness**: complete / perfect friendship, where the basis is the friend's virtue, and the parties care for each other for their own sakes.

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Imperfect friendships (those for utility and pleasure):

- dissolve easily, since their foundation can also disappear easily
- they don't require any other-regarding consideration
- they are secondary: they can be useful in life, but Aristotle is not very much interested in them.

## Complete, perfect friendship:

- stable: it endures as long as virtue endures, but virtue is a stable state of character
- the friends regard one another as “second selves”: if we have reason to love ourselves (and we do, if we are virtuous), then we have the same reason to love our friend.
- we love ourselves and our friend because they are intrinsically worthy
- perfect friendship is necessary for happiness because it is necessary for self-sufficiency!
- it is not “selfish”: we recognise the friend’s goodness first, and that’s why they become friends.

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# Why Do We Need Friends?

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## *EN 1170b14–19*

If, then, existence is in itself desirable for the blessed man (since it is by its nature good and pleasant), and that of his friend is very much the same, a friend will be one of the things that are desirable. Now that which is desirable for him he must have, or he will be deficient in this respect. The man who is to be happy will therefore need virtuous friends.

# Why Do We Need Friends?

The idea: the final good must be self-sufficient (= makes a life lacking in nothing). But if we don't have good friends, we do lack something.

- ① If one does not have a choiceworthy friend, then one lacks something choiceworthy.
- ② If one lacks something choiceworthy, then one is not self-sufficient.
- ③ If one is not self-sufficient, then one is not happy.
- ④ Therefore, if one does not have a choiceworthy friend, one is not happy.

The argument assumes the broader framework of objective happiness; the best life, whatever it is, is self-sufficient.

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## EN 1156a19, 1170b7–9

to a friendship of good men all the qualities we have named belong in virtue of the nature of the friends themselves; for in the case of this kind of friendship the other qualities also are alike in both friends, and that which is good without qualification is also without qualification pleasant, and these are the most lovable qualities. . . . And if life is desirable, and particularly so for good men, because to them existence is good and pleasant. . . ; and if as the virtuous man is to himself, he is to his friend also (for his friend is another self); — then as his own existence is desirable for each man, so, or almost so, is that of his friend.

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# Caring for Our Friends

An argument for why we should care for our friends

- ① If we are good and virtuous, then we regard ourselves with proper self-love.
- ② If those features are worthy of love as they occur in us, then they are also worthy of love if they occur in our friends.
- ③ Because they are our equals in virtue, our friends will indeed manifest the same good features we ourselves manifest.
- ④ Therefore, the good features manifested by our friends are worthy of love.
- ⑤ If their features are worthy of love, then this gives us reason to care for our friends because of who they are.
- ⑥ Therefore, we have reason to care for our friends because of who they are.

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- P1 proper self-love is virtuous (cf. self-deprecation and self-aggrandizing as the deficiency and the excess)
- P2 virtuous characteristics are not better just because they are *ours* – so, friends of equal virtue are equally worthy of love.
  - the argument relies on Aristotle's account of happiness as objective and based on the essence of human beings (if happiness is objective, then it is worthy in our friends just as in ourselves).

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- perfect friendships require the friends to be virtuous – so it's rare.
- if we have reason to be virtuous, and perfect friendship is a virtue itself, then we have reason to develop perfect friendships.
- whenever we think of our friends as being useful, we think of them not in terms of perfect friendship but in terms of friendship based on utility.